

## A Beautiful Design (Part 9) – Woman's Redemption

Matt Chandler – November 9, 2014

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Well, I'm wearing a jacket. I just thought we should address it, just throw that out there and go... I literally have built this into my notes just because I knew it was going to be awkward for all of us. I just wanted to acknowledge that. If you are a guest, none of this makes sense. I've been wearing a black polo shirt for around 20 years. I'm still wearing it. I just put a jacket over it. I'm not moving too quickly.

If you have your Bibles, Hebrews 12 is where we're going to be. It's kind of hard to believe that the fall is over. This is week nine of our 10-week fall series. We'll do redemption this morning, *Women's Redemption* in particular. Then next week, we'll do a sermon called *Together for the Gospel* in which we marvel at the beautiful design and how it plays out within the community of faith.

From there, we'll do a family worship weekend. Then we're in Advent, so it's over. I want to do this. How many of you have already started listening to Christmas music? Okay, it's not a sin. That's fine. How many of you have already decorated? Okay, keep your hands up. We're going to take your... Elders, are we on this? All right.

That's how close we are. We're close enough that about 15 percent of this room is already listening to "Jingle Bells," and about 5 percent of this room already has stuff up. We're that close to 2014 giving way to 2015. It really is flying. As they say, long days and fast years. This morning, what I want us to do is just kind of continue to move the ball forward on this series.

We've been talking about how God designed us and specifically how God designed us as man and woman, not as male and female because that would be a biological sermon series. I'm not doing that. I'm doing more a, "How has God wired us to be men? How has God wired us to be women? How do they interact with one another?"

I can't overview the whole series. We give all that stuff away. It's online for free. If you don't like something I say today or want some clarity around that, you might go back and find out you really don't like anything I've said. That is a possibility. When all is said and done, we have looked at really issues that men struggle with, issues women struggle with.

What we've done is we have created... When we were talking about manhood, we said the sins of men can be filed away really in two categories of sin. Men, when they sin, have a tendency to sin either in *selfish passivity*... They refuse to step into what God designed them to be. They won't take the lead. They won't love with sacrificial love. They won't set up environments where humanity can flourish.

They will punt on what God has designed them for, and they will lay on the couch rather than make war in a good way so our wives and children and communities might flourish, or they will sin in the area we just called *selfish aggression*. Selfish aggression is using your size and strength to dominate, bully, or oppress. All of men's sins can fit into one of those categories. You would be hard pressed to mention anything that wouldn't fit into one of those buckets.

Last weekend, we did the same thing for women out of the same text we used for men, except we said that for the woman, by and large... Of course, these are generalizations. You're going to find outliers on all of this. For women, we said women's sins can usually if not always be categorized under the kind of buckets or ideas of *comparison* and *perfectionism*, and women tend to struggle with those things differently and far more frequently than men do.

I used not just the Bible but a ton of secular psychologists and articles to prove the point that by and large, a man can look at himself in the mirror, get a zit, and think he looks fly. A woman can have some tiny flaw in her brain, and it just ruins it. "Oh my gosh. Look at that." Right? Men don't tend to be that way. They just don't tend to be that way.

In fact, there was a study at Cornell University about this specific engineering class. It was kind of the space-maker at Cornell. I don't know if you had classes like that in college if you went to college. What they noticed in their research about this class is when the class got extremely difficult at this specific point in the semester, men almost universally thought externally. The class got hard. They thought, "Man, this class is hard."

Women almost exclusively thought internally. Class got hard, and they were like, "I knew I wasn't smart enough to be in this class." Right? By and large, what the data showed from the research we looked at via *The Telegraph* and via *The Atlantic* last weekend was simply this. By and large, these issues are predominantly female issues, and females struggle with comparison in a way males don't.

It's not that men don't. It's just we're not as likely to feel frumpy. We're not as likely to think we look good in this outfit this week, and two weeks from now, put it on and go, "Oh my gosh. It's just disgusting." We don't tend to do that. If you're married to someone or dating someone, ladies, who is like that, they are an outlier. There is nothing wrong with that. They're just an outlier. Most men aren't that way. We're not overly concerned with our hair.

That's my favorite part of preaching, all of this that just went on. The wife's head jerks over; the man's head goes down. I'm not trying to shame you, bro. You look great. In that, we kind of just dissected all of that, whether selfish ambition or selfish aggression, whether that be comparison or perfectionism as really finding its root in disordered desires. Desires have been disordered. Those disordered desires lead us into all sorts of darkness.

On comparison, we said that comparison is the disordered desire for approval and validation. At the end of the day, comparison is about competition. Here's where it's so deadly. With the rise of social media, and with the rise of the smartphone, what has become normative is for all of us to see life and specifically the lives of others through a really beautiful veneer.

I've said this three weeks running. Nobody posts a picture of themselves on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter when they're all haggard, when you get that one zit you shouldn't have as an adult, that one where if it pops the wrong way, it will blow out the back of your head. You don't even rub in the Clearasil. You just put it on and go to bed. Nobody is like... No one posts that.

The veneer you and I are looking at is everybody is pretty, and everybody is strong, and everybody has it together, and everybody loves parenting, and everybody's marriage is awesome, and everybody has crazy money because they're always going out to eat and having good drinks. There is a picture of a cheese board and a glass of wine. Right?

What has happened is this veneer has been placed in front of us, so pressure is building to be happy and full and awesome and glad with no struggles, and it's bull. It's not real life. What happens when the comparison is based on a mirage is you start to fantasize. You lie in bed at night or maybe you're

just driving. You enter into a world of fantasy where your waist is smaller, your bust is bigger, you have more money than you do, everybody loves you, everyone is happy around you, all your relationships are easy. It's a veneer. It's a mirage. It's not reality.

God help us. We start to pretend that's true about us. We're not honest about brokenness. We're not honest about anxiety. We're not honest about fear. We just play the part we see in every magazine and everybody's newsfeed and every show. Right? We just play the part. We get sucked into it. Fantasy always, always, always, always leads to insecurity. All right? It leads not just to insecurity, but it leads to insecurity and discontentment.

Now that you're insecure and discontented, now comes jealousy. With jealousy and coveting then comes slander and gossip and strife. We said that where men tend to be physically imposing, God has, in his divine will, given women a power with words to either build up humanity or to burn it to the ground. Women have a profound ability to, with their words, encourage and create life or to dismantle and break apart any bit of flourishing possible.

When we buy into the veneer, when we buy into, "Oh, everybody is happy," we give into comparison that leads to fantasizing, that leads to insecurity and discontentment, that leads to coveting and jealousy, that leads to slander and gossip and the tearing down and the pointing out of weaknesses to try to make one feel better about themselves. Things just grow dark.

Perfectionism, we said, is the disordered desire for righteousness and perfection apart from Christ. Again, let's talk. If the veneer is the touchdown, if having it all together and being strong enough and having the kind of look that culture is saying we should look like, magazines are saying we should look like, Instagram feeds are saying we should look like...

By the way, ladies, look at me real quick. That's impossible outside of surgery, starving yourself, and living in the gym. Never in human history have we said that this body type is healthy or, God help us, possible. Don't carry that weight. It's absurd. When the standard of perfection is a veneer itself, we'll have no hope but to despair. How can you achieve or pursue perfection that is based on a mirage? You see that you'll always be running and never getting there.

How could there ever be hope there? How could there ever be life there? How could there ever be joy there? Here's the quote from the *Atlantic* article. "Women are different than men in this. We tend to fixate on performance, performance at home, performance at school, at work, at yoga class,

even on vacation. We obsess as mothers, as wives, as sisters, as friends, as cooks, as athletes. We are compelled toward perfection." You'll never attain because it's not based on reality.

What I pulled out last week is that women are far more likely to commit suicide than men are. Women are far more likely to have an eating disorder than men are. Women are far more likely to harm themselves and cut themselves than men are. Women are far more likely to fall into depression and anxiety. Women are far more likely to treat themselves cheaply. Right?

Again, I'm not speaking biblically. That's not out of a verse. That's out of the research that was compiled by people who do not love Jesus, do not trust this Bible, but tend to agree with the Bible and just not know it. What I want to do and how I ended last week is we have to consider how Jesus enters this space. We have to consider how Jesus, God in the flesh, and how his death on the cross and his resurrection enters this space, enters this darkness and makes sense out of it.

With that said, we're going to camp out in Hebrews 12. If you have a Bible, go ahead and turn there. If you don't have a Bible, there should be a black hardback one somewhere around you. I'm desperate for you to grab a Bible and just look at it. I'll tell you why. There are times that what the Bible says and what the preacher says are different. When those two disagree, trust the Bible, and find a new preacher.

What I want you to do is see I'm not pulling a rabbit out of my hat here. We're just reading the very words of God and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, hopefully being by read by them rather than just reading them. Are you tracking with me? Hebrews 12 is where we're going to be. We're going to read verses 1 and 2. This text has nothing to do with women and everything to do with redemption. Hebrews 12:1-2. Let us all hear it.

**"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder [author] and perfecter [developer] of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."**

Now all I want to do, in light of our brokenness, our sinfulness, our selfish passivity, our selfish aggression, our comparison, our perfectionism, is I want to take this text, and I want this text to lay

on top of all of it so that we might leave more hopeful than we came in. That's my plan. All I'm going to do is I'm going to take a phrase at a time.

Let's start with the first phrase. **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..."** Now let me just go Bible Reading 101. Whenever the Bible or really any English document says, "Therefore..." that means what they're about to say is built upon what they have already said. Right? This is stuff you learned probably first year in college, first year in high school, and have forgotten. We just don't read that way. We blow through information now.

When you're reading the Bible, and you come across the word *therefore*, the question is, "What is the *therefore* there for?" Cute, right? What is the *therefore* there for? He's about to say something. This is the very Word of God, and he's saying something based on something he has already said, so we need to go backwards into chapter 11 and get some more information before we can move on because we have to find out who this great cloud of witnesses is because we don't know who they are.

We just know that therefore, since we have this great cloud of witnesses, we're about to be asked to do something. With that said, let's look at Hebrews 11. We're going to pick it up in verse 32. Hebrews 11 is called the roll call of faith. It just lists. Really, the whole chapter is about faith and those men and women throughout human history who put their faith in God. Here's what we're going to read starting in verse 32.

**"And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection."**

Now let's just stop for a second. If there was nothing after that last sentence, then the Bible cannot be trusted, and all of this is a lie. If there is a period after that... I'm telling you. This text kind of plays into my inner man. "Shut the mouths of lions. Become mighty in war. Put foreign armies to flight." Right? "Escape the edge of the sword."

I'm looking at it like a spiritual Jason Bourne right here. I'm in. Oh, I'm in. If there was just, "Women received back their resurrection from the dead. Therefore, since we're surrounded by such a great

cloud of witnesses..." Listen. Then we would be forced to play the veneer too, wouldn't we, as Christians?

If the great cloud of witnesses says this to us, "Jesus makes everything happy. Jesus makes everything better. If you have Jesus, you won't struggle. You won't hurt. You won't lose. You won't cry. All there is with Jesus is rainbows and Skittles. You give your life to Jesus. There are no more tears and no more sadness. There is no more loss. There is no more perplexity or confusion.

There is no more anger and despair. Depression and anxiety are gone, and you will skip with gladness through all the days of your life." We would have to pretend that's what Christianity is, wouldn't we? God help you. That's what some of you are doing. But the text doesn't stop there. That's not just our great cloud of witnesses. There isn't even a transition sentence here. I just feel like there should be a transition sentence.

**Verse 35. "Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."**

Praise God for that grimy next paragraph. Here's what I know. This is what life actually looks like. This is the way life actually works. It's not all rainbows and Skittles. It's not all happy. It's not all Instagram on a Friday night. That's not the way life works, and we *know* it. Any version of Christianity that has been so Americanized as to make it this clean, happy, clappy, skip through the days of your life should never be trusted. It's not how life works. It's not how the Bible says life works. In fact, what we see right here is, "Follow Jesus. It could end really badly."

I think if we're not careful, there is a type of weird, prosperity, Americanized Christianity that we buy into that is not helpful. It's not helpful. This text helps us redefine the win, redefine the touchdown. Here is what I think so many of us bought into and why so many of us are prone to despair and give up. Giving our hearts to Jesus does not mean that the rest of our days will have no struggle. You will war against your flesh until glory. You will wrestle. You will have spells of doubt where you'll have to push in by faith and trust the Lord.

You will wrestle with sin. You will have relational strife. You will. Christ doesn't make all that go away. He empowers and grants faith to walk faithfully in those things. The good news of the gospel is you get him regardless of circumstances, not that he makes all those things go away. If you're like, "I don't like this," well, bro, this is your life one way or the other.

You have to do something with this because you want to give yourself over to a type of prosperity gospel that says if you just have enough faith, none of this will be true. If you just have enough faith, your bank account will be fat. Your spouse will be fine. Your kids will be awesome. That's an Americanized version of this that is ridiculous. Faithful Christianity doesn't mean we all live in the burbs safe and sound with kids who are obedient. It's not the Cleavers.

It's by faith following after the Lord in the highs and lows of the reality of life in a broken world. If you've been struggling with sin, in doubt, with anxiety, with fear, and you feel like an anomaly because you feel that way, you feel like an outlier, you feel like an outsider, then I'm telling you you're buying into a veneer-based Christianity that hasn't been honest with you.

Of all places on earth, the church should be that place where it's okay to not be okay. If we must be anything, it must be those who wage war against the pull to look pretty, the pull to look like we have it all together, the pull to adopt a language that is not our reality, the pull to pretend we're more than we are when it comes to understanding, knowing, and trusting Jesus.

Men and women who are most free are most apt to say, "I'm struggling. I am confused. I am perplexed. I am... Pray with me. Help me. Call me. Walk alongside of me. Encourage my heart. I'm running out of gas." We're looking backward at this great cloud of witnesses. See, he's totally redefining success and failure.

If you saw a brother destitute, afflicted, wandering about in the desert wearing goatskins... Don't *GQ* that. I don't know where things are. Don't be like, "I just read in *Vanity Fair* that goatskins are..." No. That's not what is being written about here. We would look at a brother destitute and afflicted, mocked and impoverished not as a win but as a fail, something to be fixed.

Yet, the Bible just said, "**...of whom the world was not worthy...**" It is by faith in affliction that he showed Christ to be glorious. He wasn't skipping around in the desert. He was trying to find shelter in a cave. God met him in the midst of that difficulty. He put his faith in the presence of God, in the sovereign will of God and had his soul bolstered.

In perfectionism, you're saying, "I desire my own righteousness. I'll divine my own righteousness. I'll live up to the terms of my own standards." I always just on this question particularly want to know how it is working for you. On that touchdown of perfection, how is that working for you? Surely it's like trying to grab a fistful of oil. Your hands might be dirty, but you're not holding anything.

What he says next in this text... Look back at it so you see I'm not making stuff up. **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."** He does this interesting thing here. He talks about weight and sin. He talks as though they're different than one another. In reality, they are very much different.

Again, this is one of those areas that I feel like most Christians don't have a category for. It ends up wounding us. We begin to wave the flag of legalism to our own destruction. When we're talking about weight and sin, we're talking about what fuels and feeds our sin. There is the sin that has to be taken care of. Let's talk comparison. As we spiral down in comparison, we end up with gossip and slander, wounding with words, being harsh, tearing down with our words.

Those are easily... The Bible is filled. God hates gossip. He hates slander. He hates someone who would try to wound another purposefully with their words. All right? That needs to be confessed and handled, but that didn't spring up out of nowhere. Something fed that. Something fed into it. What we need to do is rewind and go, "Okay. What's the weight that provides the fuel for that sin to actually be executed upon?"

I'll use two quick illustrations. There is nothing in the Bible that prohibits me from enjoying a glass of wine or a nice bourbon, nothing. You couldn't find a text and lay it before me and say, "The Bible says if you have that glass of wine, that's a sin." You couldn't do it, but there are all sorts of people for whom it is not wise for them to do it.

Let's just talk. There are some people who shouldn't ever be a bartender. Alcoholics make terrible bartenders. In the same way, I don't think there is anything sinful or evil about Instagram, fitness magazines, and all these things, but listen to me. You struggle with body issue. You struggle with how you see yourself. If Instagram is that thing you're looking through right before you go to bed

only to set your device down, roll over, and wish you looked different, wish you had more, and feel discontentment in your life grow, then I'm telling you, leveling with you, quit doing that.

"Does the Bible say I shouldn't look at it?" No, it doesn't, but surely you're smarter than that. We don't put ourselves in harm's way just because we can. Here he's saying, "Be so serious about the sin that controls you that you're considering something that might just feed that sin." It could be morally neutral, but it leads you into dark areas and dark places and dark thoughts. We should be this serious about the things of God. Again, you struggle with body image stuff. I just don't think you should be looking at *Women's Fitness* magazine. It is airbrushed like a mug.

Not right now, because I'm preaching, but after you leave here, if you get on YouTube, a brother took Photoshop, took a piece of pizza, and made it into a bikini model. I'm not kidding. Look it up. It's stunning. You're like, "Dang, that girl is fine, except she's pizza." All right. I'm not making this up. You can YouTube it. I'm watching. I better not see you on your devices going, "No way." Trust me. I was going to show it. I don't have enough time. I have too much content.

We're saying in this time that this isn't wise. We have to throw off the weight so it doesn't lead us into sin. What are those things? I think you have to pay attention to that. Ladies and men, what are those things that lead us to those sins that we have a tendency to give ourselves over to? We throw off not just the weight, but we throw off sin so that we might run the race with endurance that he marked out for us.

How are we to do that? That sounds awesome, but how are we to do that? This is where things get awesome. Look at the next line, verse 2. "**...looking to Jesus** [fixing our eyes upon Jesus], **the founder and perfecter of our faith...**" What I want to do is just talk about these two things. The first thing it's going to say is that we need to get our eyes on Jesus.

If we want to get rid of weightedness and throw off sin and run this race with endurance, where our eyes are matters. He's saying, "Get your eyes on Jesus." Let me tell you why. The most loving thing I do here as your pastor is say this to you. You are not awesome. You're not. What happens is where we place our eyes matters in regards to joy, vitality, energy, life force, whatever you want to call it. It matters what you're looking at.

If you are a naval-gazer, you are always going to be overwhelmed. "I'm never going to get this done. I stink. I did it again. I can't believe I did it again. When am I going to get this thing right? Gosh. I just

feel like I fail all the time." Yeah, you are. Every time. When it comes to righteousness, you are an incompetent noob, but if you'll get your eyes up, everything changes. Why? Because he is the author and perfecter of our faith.

Let's take him in two pieces. Let's start with author of our faith, founder of our faith. Let's make sure we're theologically sound here. You did not find Jesus; he found you. He was never lost.

"Where did Jesus go?" He came and grabbed you. Listen. If we'll actually think about this, if we'll think about how Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the will of the Father, invaded our space and made things new, things begin to change.

I didn't come to him; he came and grabbed me. I was heading to law school. I was going to drive a phat 7 Series BMW, make a ton of cash, and rule the world. He was like, "Nope. You're going to drive an '08 Honda and pastor people." Listen. I love that he did that. Everything about my life changed when he invaded my space, when he entered my heart, and said, "There are better ways and better things and deeper waters and greater experiences of life. Come on."

He didn't force me to love him; he just showed me who he was, and I was in. The Bible says, "It was God who transferred me out of the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of his Son." Romans 8 says he called me unto himself according to his electing love. On and on and on I could go. God was the active one. You are the passive one in your salvation. This is his idea. He came and grabbed you.

If you'll get your eyes off of yourself with all your foolishness and failures and get your eyes on that, then confidence begins to grow because God can't fail. God doesn't fail. Nobody slips through his fingers. This is his idea. He invaded your space. You're like, "Well, my mom told me. My dad was telling me." No, stop. Sure they did. Praise God if they did.

I have three kids. I have no power over their souls. Here's what I can do. I can make them obey because at this point, I am stronger, and at this point, I can take everything from them. Oh, you guys don't have kids, huh? You don't threaten like that? "No Xbox for you." Right? I can take things they love from them, so they do what I say. I think they like me. I think they love me. I just think mainly they're just doing what I say because I have a ton of authority in the Chandler home.

I can't make them love Jesus. I can make them watch their mouths. I can make them treat each other with kindness, or at least I'm trying. Right? I can make them do these things. I cannot birth into their hearts a love for the Lord. Only God can do that. It's what makes us desperate as parents. He

came and got you. If you'll get your eyes off of you and start to look at him, there is this weird kind of paradox that happens.

One, there is this onset of humility now because we know we're not awesome. Here's where it's paradoxical. Not only is there a new kind of humility and meekness, but there is this explosion of confidence because I know I can't, but I know he can. See, if we fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder, the author of our faith, things begin to change.

The second word there and the reason we have to fix our eyes on Jesus, look to this Jesus who is our founder and our perfecter (or *developer* can also be used there) is that he who began the work will be faithful to complete it. Here is a question nobody likes the answer to. How does God shape and form faith in the hearts of believers?

The first thing is he does it supernaturally by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith is a gift of grace. Secondly, he forms faith, he exercises the muscle of faith, with joy and sorrow. We'll just have a conversation that's uncomfortable. When do you find yourself most aware of God and most aware of your need for him and his goodness and grace? When everything is awesome or when you're really jammed up? When you're really jammed up, right?

When the thorn in the flesh twists, we find him most near. It's not that he's not near when things are all awesome; it's that when everything is awesome, we think we did that. We're not dumb. We give him that one off. "Praise his name. I got that promotion." We're not like, "I got that promotion. Please, God, help me. Sanctify my stupid soul." We don't do that after we get a promotion. We get that after we go to the doctor. We get that after a kid goes wayward. We get that when we're struggling with fear. We get that when we feel lost.

At that moment where we cry out and cling, we find him near and find him all we need and more. If you don't know me, I am not naïve. I have experienced heights that would be hard for me to unpack, but I had a tumor cut out of my right frontal lobe. I had to endure eighteen months of high-dose chemo. I've been radiated, laid on the bathroom floor, and didn't enjoy it. Trying to muster strength to pull up on the toilet and vomit again. The first seven years of my marriage were a nightmare.

I could go on and on. I put two of my children in the backs of ambulances not knowing how that was going to end. I stayed up extremely late throughout the night with a nurse icing down my 6-month-old youngest, hoping that the fever would break and she wouldn't die. I'm not saying this as some

ignorant dude who reads books. I'm saying that in the dark night of the soul, he is there. We have not been betrayed, and we have not been left out.

If you don't get your eyes up, you won't see well enough to see this and to know there are times that difficulties aren't there to be solved but are there as a measure of God's grace. Somebody better clap because it's true. Do you see how nervous the clap is? We don't like it. We're like, "Okay, but for me... If you'll just do good stuff, I promise... I know, but I'll praise you." Sure, you will, but there is something that gets wrung out of the soul in the dark night of the soul that can't be wrung out when that's not the case.

Get your eyes up. He who began the good work will be faithful to complete it. He is going to complete it. Then look where he goes next. **"...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."** Now the first thing we have to tackle is this idea of the joy set before him. Nothing about the cross and being crucified and having the skin ripped out of your back and being spit upon and mocked and nails driven through your hands and feet and drowning in your own blood should fit under the category of joy.

What are we to do with this word? I think one of the things that is good to see... We know Jesus is not giddy about the opportunity to go to the cross. He is sweating blood in the garden saying, "If this cup can pass, I'd rather not go this way, but not because I will but because you will. I would rather us go a different way with this, Father, but if this is your will, then I am gladly willing to lay down my life to accomplish your will even in this most grotesque and apex of human barbarianism."

I think one of the joys we see is found in Galatians 1:15-16. This is written by Paul, an apostle who was formerly Saul of Tarsus. A modern day equivalent to Saul of Tarsus would be any of the field generals in ISIS who are currently beheading and slaughtering our brothers and sisters across the Middle East. Paul was a murderer who heartily approved of murder, who, according to law and permission, was hunting down our brothers and sisters through the ancient Near East.

Here's how he describes his conversion. Galatians 1:15-16. **"But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone..."** That word *pleased* there, when we talked through Galatians a couple of years ago, really jumped off the page.

I began to look around at how often God's saving work in Christ is talked about in regard to joy and pleasure for God the Father in purchasing for himself, Jesus' self, many sons and daughters so that in one way, not completely, but in one way, the joy set before Christ on that day was you and me coming to know him, being adopted by him, him calling us his own, him paying the price for our sin is the joy set before him. That's a stunning reality, and it's nearly impossible to believe.

God feels pleasure toward you? If anything, the most we can muster is that he feels patience toward us, right? If I think about how God feels about me, *feels* about me, I don't think he feels pleasure; I think he feels patience. I think he feels like, "Gosh, I can't wait until he gets *here*." The Bible is saying, "No, no, no. He feels pleasure now." Again, these are things... I'm not saying anything new here. God doesn't love the future version of you any more than he loves the version of you right now.

That's the scandal of the gospel. That's the scandal of what Jesus has done. It's not you all put together that God is wild about. In fact, was it not you at your worst that Jesus saved? Didn't he know what he was getting when he bought you? You have not surprised him. He can't be surprised. He has never been shocked, never been confused, never had to huddle up with the rest of the Godhead. That has never occurred.

"With joy, he endured the cross." What does that mean? I've spent a majority of my life being confused about what a Jew killed on a Roman cross 2,000 years ago had to do with me. Here are three things very quickly. First, on the cross, he died for your sins, 1 Corinthians 15:3. **"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures..."** Jesus died on the cross for your sins, for my sins.

Why does that matter? Well, I'm glad you asked. When he died for our sins, he cancelled out the debt we owed because of our sins. This is Colossians 2:13-14. **"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."**

I owe no debt. Here is what this is saying. Let's make this really personal. If you have a moment you can't get over, if you have done things you thought you would never be capable of doing, if you consistently struggle in areas where you feel the weight of condemnation, if you can think back and

still, with nausea in your gut, go, "I can't believe I did that," and have been trying with religion to pay it back, look at me. You are paying a debt you do not owe.

You can flog yourself and punish yourself all you want, but that has been paid for in full. It was nailed to the cross of Christ, which is why the apostle Paul says this. The same guy who wrote that says, "The life I live now in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave himself up for me. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live." That old version of you was killed with Christ on the cross so that when he sees now is his perfect obedience imputed to us.

That moment in the garden when he's crying out, "Not my will but yours, Father," and he goes to the cross, that obedience despite fear, despite pain, despite loss is imputed to us so that wherever in the gospels you see Jesus being obedient, that is imputed to you. Because of the cross, God sees none of your disobedience and all of Christ's perfect obedience. That's a heck of a trade. Yeah? Sure.

One more thing about the cross. Not only does he die for our sins and cancel out the debt we owe because of sin, but he redeems us. It says in 1 Peter 1:18-19, "**...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.**"

Again, just very quickly, something to note on this (we said this last week) is that whatever is ultimate in your affections is your slave master. You are a slave to whatever is ultimate to you. Let me unpack that. If power is the one thing you must have, you will be a slave to power. If money is that one thing you have to have, you will be a slave to money. If male attention is that one thing you have to have, you will be a slave to male attention. If your family, if your job, if approval, if whatever, if keeping up with the veneer is ultimate in your heart, you will be a slave to those things.

What happens on the cross is you are purchased out of that slavery into the freedom Christ affords, but not with silver and not with gold. No, you are purchased with something far more valuable, the blood of God in the flesh, so he now has said, "You are mine, and I am yours." This is that idea of adoption where God stakes his claim in calling us his own. He delights in us as children, not just as some sort of judge who has forgiven, but as a Father who enters in lovingly to our confusion, brokenness, perplexity, and struggles.

Listen to this. Such good news. Then I want to make a plea, and we'll be dismissed. It says that he despised the shame and is seated on the right hand of God. I love that the cross flips shame on its head. A few weeks ago, I baptized a young man at the 7:15 service. Our baptistery is over there. If you're a guest, you can't see it. If you're on camera, you can't see it. The baptistery is over there. I baptized this young man. We celebrated his story, a real sweet story.

He really grew up in a home where Mom was talking to him about Jesus, and he just felt awakened to believe, so he gave his heart to Jesus. We got out of the water. Everybody clapped. We rejoiced in his profession of faith. The next young man was an African-American young man in his early or mid to late twenties who was ferociously abused by his father and gave himself over to all sorts of sexual deviance that I will not repeat in this room. It was grotesque and dark and horrific.

What was meant for his shame, what was meant to make him feel dirty and broken, what the Devil would have loved to have used to just destroy him and oppress him all the days of his life was actually said out loud to a group of strangers so that we might all marvel in the grace and glory of God that would enter that brother's story and say, "No, you're mine."

Listen to me. If you've come in here today, and you're not a Christian, and you're looking around and thinking, "Man, I just don't know that I could fit in here. You guys all look like you have it together," I'm telling you you don't know who you're sitting with. Pull your purse tighter. Listen to me. Gosh. We're broken here. Again, back to Hebrews 11. We have put our faith in this, that we are forgiven and loved despite us, so we're going to get back up and keep walking.

If you hang around, you'll see we're hypocritical, and that should make you feel at home. I'm not dogging you. Do you really think you're nailing it? You'll find us a people who keeps getting back up and trusting that he has not changed his mind about us. By faith, believing that he knew what he was buying with his blood when he died.

Now let me read this text and make an appeal. We'll go see how the boys are doing. Romans 8, starting in verse 1. Don't check right now. **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do."** God has done what we cannot do. We cannot obey the law. God took care of that for us.

**"By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."**

Two quick things in conclusion. If you are not a Christian, and you're here with us today, a friend invited you, you stumbled in, you begrudgingly came with a family member, let me just say this to you. I want all my cards on the table. I want you to become a Christian. I *want* you to become a Christian. What a great offer for you! What a great offer for us all! You should *want* this to be true. There is no error, is no struggle, is no weariness that has more power than the cross of Christ.

God will empower us as we move forward, as we struggle. He will undergird us, strengthen us, walk alongside of us, and be our strength. You should want this to be true. You should *want* this to be true. What is stopping you? Listen. You have a terrible, terrible slave master right now. You want money, success, physical looks, the acceptance of others? These are harsh, harsh slave masters.

Jesus says, "I'll be your Lord. I'll be your Lord. You will find that my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." If you're not a Christian, I just want to say lay your yes down. The invitation from God is, "Come all who are weary and heavy laden, and you will find rest for your soul. I'm here. Rest in me." Maybe you're like, "Okay. All this sounds good. I don't know what to do with that, and I don't think you actually know all I'm struggling with. You would never say that." I'm telling you again you don't know who you're sitting with.

In Acts 2, Peter preaches a sermon, and the crowd says, "Tell us what to do." They're broken of heart. "Tell us what to do." He says, "Repent and be baptized." You'll have a minute or two here in a little while to do just that. We're going to come to the Lord's Table, celebrate the broken body and shed blood. We'll sing a song and be dismissed.

There will be pastors all around who are willing to pray with you, willing to talk with you, willing to bring this clarity. You should want this to be true. I want you to be saved. I want you to be saved here. I want you to walk alongside of us, struggle with us. I don't have an ego that needs to be stroked. I don't need to try to build some mantra. "Oh, how great of a church." We're not a great church; we serve a great God.

I would never brag on The Village Church. You'll get in here and find us to be messy and failing you all the time, but what you'll find is people who trust in grace, trust in faith in what God has done and said about us. We get up and keep walking. I want this for you, but I can't do it for you. You'll have to take steps of faith. You'll have to repent of sin. You'll have to cast off the former slave master and trust Jesus as your Lord, repenting of your sins and lining yourself up with how God designed us to function and work. It's going to take time. It's going to be messy, and that's what we're here for.

Then I also want to just say this. If you're a Christian who still has a tendency to give themselves over to self-condemnation, give yourself over to comparison, give yourself over to wickedness, I want to just once again remind you that the ongoing ethic of the Christian is confession and repentance, pushing into community to be encouraged, to be walked alongside of, that we might fight sin with one another. I want to encourage you, brothers and sisters, to not forget the things we're saying today are true for us. It is hard to believe. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these men and women. I thank you for redemption. I thank you that we have been bought with a price. I thank you that we are no longer our own. I thank you that you are a good, good Father. You are a great Lord. You lead us to streams of living water. You allow us to lie down in green pastures. You care, love, and walk alongside of us in the highs and lows.

You have not abandoned us to difficulty or darkness. You have not betrayed us but rather, with joy and sorrow, wooing us onto yourself, loosening our hands on the things of this world so we might hold onto something that is eternal and able to fill the soul with what the soul is hungry for. Help us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.